



**Borrowing
the Plantain
Fan**

Monkey Series 18

Borrowing the Plantain Fan

This is the eighteenth in a series of thirty-four books telling the story of Monkey, adapted from the Chinese fantasy novel *Journey to the West*. In the previous book Monkey was sent back to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit for having killed bandits who were trying to hold up his master, the Tang Priest. Monkey found a false Monkey as overlord on the mountain. The two went to the Tang Priest, the Jade Emperor, and the Lords of the Underworld to be told apart, but no one could do so. Finally with the help of his golden bowl Sakyamuni revealed the fake one as a six-eared macaque.

Borrowing the Plantain Fan, illustrated with seventy-four colour pictures, tells of Monkey's three encounters with Raksasi and her husband, the Bull Demon King, in trying to borrow the magic plantain fan to subdue the flames of the Fiery Mountains. With the help of a host of spirits Monkey overcomes them and leads his master and fellow disciples over the Fiery Mountains.

The next book in the series:

The next book in the series, *Battling the Nine-Headed Monster*, tells about the recovery of the Buddhist treasure from Golden Light Monastery. When the treasure is stolen, the king has all the monks arrested. Monkey, however, finds out that the Nine-Headed Monster is the culprit and, after a fierce fight, gets back the treasure, avenging the monks.

Borrowing the Plantain Fan

*Adapted by Zhen Huan
from the novel Journey to the West
Illustrated by Hu Libin*



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After Monkey had killed the false Monkey King he escorted the Tang Priest on westwards. The scorching heat of summer was over and they were now in late autumn. As master and disciples pressed ahead they began to feel hotter and hotter. "Disciple," said the Tang Priest, dismounting, "go to that house by the roadside and find out why it's so hot here."



Monkey walked up to the gate and saw an old man come out from inside. Monkey bowed to him and said, "We have been sent by the Great Tang emperor in the East to fetch scriptures from the West and are just passing by. We should very much like to know why it's so hot here."



The old man let them in and told them, "Twenty miles ahead on your way to the West lies the Fiery Mountains. Over there there are about three hundred miles of flames. Not a single blade of grass can possibly grow anywhere around. Even if you had a bronze head and an iron body you would have melted before crossing them." When they heard this, the Tang Priest and his disciples turned pale with horror.



Just then a man was selling cakes outside the door. Monkey went over and asked, "How do you get the flour to make your cakes when it's so hot here?" The man said, "Nearby is a Princess Iron Fan who has a plantain fan. If requested, this fan can put out fire at the first wave, produce a breeze at the second wave, and bring rain at the third wave. That is how we can sow and reap the crops to support ourselves."



On hearing this Monkey rushed back inside and asked the old man, "Could you tell me where Princess Iron Fan lives?" "She lives in the Plantain Cave on Mount Turquoise Cloud," the old man said. "It is about five hundred miles from here and the journey will take you at least a month." "No problem," said Monkey. "I will be back in no time." And with that he disappeared.



Instantly Monkey arrived at Mount Turquoise Cloud. Seeing a woodcutter, he bounded over and asked about the whereabouts of Princess Iron Fan's Plantain Cave. "It's just east of here," said the woodcutter. "The Iron Fan Immortal is also called Raksasi, and she is the wife of the Bull Demon King." Monkey was shocked by this news. "Another one who's got it in for me," he thought.



Monkey had just found the Plantain Cave when a girl came out. He addressed her politely, saying, “Would you kindly tell the princess that I am a monk on my way to the West to fetch the scriptures. I’ve come to beg her to loan me her plantain fan as we can’t get across the Fiery Mountains.”



When Princess Iron Fan heard that Monkey had come for the fan she was consumed with anger. “So that damned monkey’s here at last!” She put on her armour, grasped her weapons and went out to meet him.



Monkey and the Bull Demon King were sworn brothers. Seeing Princess Iron Fan come out of the cave Monkey stepped forward and bowed, saying, "Monkey offers his respectful greetings, sister-in-law." "I'm no sister-in-law of yours," she shouted angrily, "and if you have any feeling for your sworn brother why did you have to do that terrible thing to our Red Boy?" "That was to save my master," replied Monkey, "and the Bodhisattva Guanyin has already taken your son as the Page Sudhana."



“You smooth-tongued ape,” Raksasi snapped back. “My boy may be alive, but when am I going to see him again?” “It’ll be easy for you to see your son again,” Monkey relied. “Just lend me the fan to put the fires out. Then I’ll go to the Bodhisattva and ask him to come here to see you and give your fan back.”



“Shut up, ape fiend!” Raksasi snapped again. “Stick your head out and I’ll hack it with my sword. If you can stand the pain I’ll lend you the plantain fan. If you can’t I’ll send you to Hell to see Yama.”



“That’s fine,” Monkey replied, and with that he stuck out his head. Raksasi swung her swords and brought them down a dozen or more times on Monkey’s head, but he wasn’t bothered at all. “Put a little more muscles into it, sister-in-law!” he suggested.



Raksasi was so frightened by this that she turned to escape. "Lend me that fan, sister-in-law." Monkey pleaded. "My fan isn't something to be lent out casually," Raksasi replied. "If you refuse to loan me the fan as you promised, you'll have to taste my cudgel." He pulled out his cudgel and struck, Raksasi quickly raising her swords to meet him, and the fight began in front of Mount Turquoise Cloud.



Monkey's cudgel struck so hard that Raksasi realized she would never be able to beat him. She took out her plantain fan, turned it into an enormous size, and with a single wave blew Monkey out of sight.



Monkey was thrown around in the air, and only after a whole night's buffeting did he manage to land on a mountain the next morning. Calming himself, Monkey took a good look around, and realized that he was on Little Mount Sumeru. "What a terrible fan!" Monkey said to himself with a deep sigh. "It has blown me several tens of thousands of miles away!" Then he went to the monastery on the mountain to see Bodhisattva Lingji.



At the monastery Monkey told Bodhisattva Lingji that their way had been blocked by the Fiery Mountains and he wanted to borrow the plantain fan. "Raksasi's plantain fan is a miraculous treasure. If it fans somebody he'll be blown twenty-seven thousand miles away. You must have the power to delay clouds, so you can make a stop here," said Lingji.



“She’s terrible,” said Monkey. “How can my master ever cross over those mountains?” “Don’t worry,” Lingji replied. “The Buddha gave me two treasures: a Wind-fixing Pill and a Flying Dragon Staff. The Flying Dragon Staff was used to subdue the Yellow Wind Monster, but I haven’t yet tried out the Wind-fixing Pill. I’ll give it to you to help you to get the plantain fan and subdue the flames.”



Monkey took the Wind-fixing Pill and said good-bye to Bodhisattva Lingji. He rode his somersault cloud straight back to Mount Turquoise Cloud. "Open up, open up!" he shouted, hammering on the doors of the Plantain Cave with his cudgel. "Monkey's here to borrow the fan."



When the princess came out of the cave Monkey pleaded with her politely. But Raksasi shouted back, “I haven’t yet avenged the loss of my son, so how could I possibly lend you my fan?” The two of them fought again. Seeing little hope to win the fight, Raksasi took out the fan and fanned it three times, yet Monkey stood there unmoved. She was so alarmed that she fled back into the cave and shut the doors tight.



When Monkey saw this he performed a little magic and turned himself into a tiny insect and squeezed in through the crack between the doors.



Inside the cave, Rakshasi was shouting, “I’m thirsty, I’m thirsty. Quick, bring me some tea.” The servant girl in attendance fetched a pot of the best tea. Clever Monkey just flew under the tea froth, while Rakshasi was so parched that she drained the tea in two gulps.



Once inside her stomach Monkey reverted to his own form and shouted at the top of his voice, "Sister-in-law, lend me the fan!" Raksasi went pale when she realized that Monkey was in her stomach. Then Monkey began stamping his feet, causing Raksasi unbearable pains. "Spare me, brother-in-law, spare me," Raksasi pleaded.



Only then did Monkey stop hitting and kicking. “I’ll spare your life for my brother Bull’s sake. Get me the fan, and quick.” Raksasi told the servant girl to fetch the plantain fan. Monkey poked his head up her throat to make sure that the fan had actually been brought, then he flew out and turned back into himself. Taking the fan, Monkey thanked the princess and left.



The Tang Priest, Pig and Friar Sand were very pleased to see Monkey back. “Princess Iron Fan is Raksasi,” Monkey told them, “the wife of the Bull Demon King and the Red Boy’s mother.” Then Monkey described how he managed to borrow the fan, and the Tang Priest was impressed by his story.



Master and disciples then took their leave of the old man and travelled west for about fifteen miles. By then the heat was becoming unbearable, and Pig was complaining that his feet were getting burnt. “Please dismount, Master,” said Monkey, “and please stay here while I use the fan to put out the fire. When the wind and rain come the ground will be a lot cooler and we’ll be able to get across the mountains.”



Raising the fan Monkey fanned it hard once in the direction of the fire, and the flames rose above the mountains. He fanned again, and they were a hundred times as high. He fanned a third time, and now they were a couple of miles high. Monkey ran straight back to the Tang Priest and said, "Hurry back, hurry back, the flames are coming!"



Master and disciples ran several miles before stopping to catch their breath. Monkey threw away the fan, swearing, "That demon has fooled me. The more I fanned the fiercer the fire became." "What are we going to do if we can't find any other way to the West?" Friar Sand asked. "There's no fire in the east, north or south," said Pig, "why do we have to go west anyway?" "We're well and truly stuck," said Friar Sand. "Where there are scriptures there's fire, and where there's no fire there are no scriptures."



While they were bemoaning their troubles an old man appeared with some vegetarian food. He bowed to them and said, "I am the local god of the Fiery Mountains. I know you are escorting this holy monk to the West and are blocked here by the fire, so I have brought this meal as an offering."



“We’re much more concerned about the fire than eating,” said Monkey. “How can we put out the fire so that our master can continue the journey west?” “You must first ask Raksasi to lend you the plantain fan,” the local god said. Monkey showed him the fan he had got. “That’s not the real one,” said the local deity, “she fooled you. If you want to borrow the real plantain fan you will have to ask the Bull Demon King.”



"The Bull Demon King has abandoned Raksasi," the local god said, "and married Princess Jade, a fox spirit's daughter who has property worth a million dollars. He is now living in the Cloud-touching Cave at Mount Thunder Piled about one thousand miles away. If you can find him, you'll be able to borrow the real fan."



Monkey left his master with the local god and riding on his somersault cloud he arrived at Mount Thunder Piled in less than half an hour.



He landed deep in the mountain where he saw a slender young woman approaching. Monkey bowed to her and asked, "Where might I find the Cloud-touching Cave?" "What do you want to find it for?" the woman asked. "I've been sent by Princess Iron Fan in the Plantain Cave on Mount Turquoise Cloud with an invitation for the Bull Demon King," Monkey replied.



Upon hearing of an invitation from Princess Iron Fan to the Bull Demon King she flared into a rage and started swearing. "She ought to know better, the low-down hussy. Goodness only knows how much jewellery, gold, silver, fine silk and brocade I've given her since the Bull Demon King came here. Who does she think she is, sending him an invitation?" When Monkey realized that she was Princess Jade he shouted at her, "You're the low-down hussy, using your wealth to buy the Bull Demon King. Have you no shame?!"



At this, she fled trembling with terror. Monkey chased after her, and beyond the shade of the trees he saw the entrance to the Cloud-touching Cave. She ran inside and the doors slammed shut behind her.



She threw herself into the Bull Demon King's arms and sobbed. "Just now I was out and a monk with a face like a thunder god rushed up to me," she said. "He said he'd been sent by that Princess Iron Fan with an invitation for you. Before I had finished my first sentence, he started abusing me. It's enough to make one die of shame!"



The Bull Demon King consoled her, saying, "That wife of mine has had the highest moral principles since childhood, and she's also an immortal who has attained the Way. She runs her household very strictly. There's not even a page there. She couldn't possibly have sent a monk with a face like a thunder god. He must be some evil fiend using her name to come and see me. I'm going out to have a look."



The demon king donned his armour and, taking his iron cudgel, strode out of the cave. Seeing that it was Monkey he asked, "First you made my son suffer and now you upset my beloved concubine. What's this all about?"



Monkey bowed. "Your son has been converted and is now the Page Sudhana," Monkey said. "He's even taller than you now. My master cannot cross the Fiery Mountains and I went to your place to borrow the plantain fan but I was refused by sister-in-law, so I've come to you for help."



“You’ve been pushing my wife around and trying to fool me,” shouted the Bull Demon King. “It’s an outrage. Come over and have a taste of my cudgel.” The Bull Demon King was in no mood for further argument, and he hit at Monkey’s head. Monkey struck back with his gold-banded cudgel.



Monkey and the Bull Demon King fought over a hundred rounds with no one winning. Just then a voice called, “King Bull, my king sends his respects and invites you to honour him with your presence at a banquet.” At this the Bull Demon King called out, “You stay here, Monkey. I’m going to a friend’s house for a meal. We can go on fighting when I come back.”



With that he mounted his water-averting golden-eyed beast and headed off northwest. Monkey thought, "I wonder who the friend is and where he's gone for his banquet. I'll follow him."



Soon they reached a mountain, and stopped by the side of a deep pool, but the Bull Demon King suddenly disappeared. The old bull must have gone into the water, Monkey thought.



Monkey shook himself, turned into a crab and went straight down to the bottom of the pool. He crawled through an ornamental arch and saw the Bull Demon King drinking happily with an ancient dragon spirit in a large hall.



“That Bull Demon King is drinking for all he’s worth in there,” Monkey thought. “I’m not going to wait till the feast breaks up. And even if I did he still wouldn’t lend me the fan.” He suddenly thought of a trick. Crawling out again, he reverted to his original form and untied the golden-eyed beast.



Monkey leapt into the carved saddle, and rode up from the bottom of the water. He made himself look like the Bull Demon King and soon reached the mouth of the Plantain Cave at Mount Turquoise Cloud.



“Open up!” Monkey imitated the Bull Demon King’s voice. Raksasi hurried out to meet him and said, “What has brought you back here today?” “I heard that Monkey is obstructed by the Fiery Mountains,” he said, “I was worried that he might come and ask you to lend him the fan, and you might not be able to defeat him, so I’ve come to help.”



When they got inside the cave, Princess Iron Fan told him what had happened. Monkey put on a great show of being furious, saying, "How terrible, you should never have given that treasure to the ape." "Don't be angry, Your Majesty," Raksasi replied. "I lent him a false fan and tricked him into going away."



Raksasi then told the serving girls to lay on wine to welcome him back. Seeing that she was becoming drunk Monkey asked, “Where have you put the real fan?” At this Raksasi tittered, spat it out of her mouth, and handed it to Monkey. It was only the size of an apricot leaf. Monkey took it but could not believe that it was the real thing. “How could a tiny little thing like this blow a fire out?” he asked, pretending to have drunk.



The Princess said to the false Bull Demon King, “That Princess Jade must have addled your head if you can’t even remember about your own treasure.” Then she told him the spell to make the fan become bigger.



The false Bull Demon King memorized the spell. He put the fan in his mouth, rubbed his face and turned back into himself. “Raksasi!” he shouted, “look carefully.” Terrified by Monkey’s trick she pushed the dining table over and fell into the dust. Overcome with shame she screamed, “I’m so upset I could die, I could die.”



Monkey rushed straight out of the Plantain Cave. He spat the fan out of his mouth, said the spell and, lo and behold, the fan became bigger. But Monkey didn't know the spell to make the fan shrink. So he had to shoulder it as he set off back to find his master and fellow disciples.



When the Bull Demon King finished his feast he found that his water-averting golden-eyed beast was missing. He suddenly realized that Monkey must have stolen the beast to go and trick the plantain fan out of his wife. He sprang up and rode a cloud straight to Mount Turquoise Cloud, where he found the beast tethered outside the Plantain Cave. He pushed open the doors and rushed in.



Just then Raksasi was pouring out abuse on Monkey for having tricked her. “Please calm yourself, wife,” the Bull Demon King said, “and don’t be so upset. When I’ve caught the ape and taken the treasure off him I’ll skin him and break his bones. I hope that’ll make you feel better.” He then strode out of the Plantain Cave, with a sword in his hand, and headed straight for the Fiery Mountains in pursuit of Monkey.



The Bull Demon King caught up with Monkey and saw him looking very cheerful as he went along with the plantain fan over his shoulder. The demon king thought, "If I ask him to give me back the fan he'll certainly refuse, and if he fans me with it and sends me thirty-six thousand miles away, that will just make matters worse." He decided to play a trick on Monkey.



The Bull Demon King turned himself into a double of Pig and went down to meet Monkey. "I'm here, brother," he called. "You've been away for so long that our master sent me to meet you. The plantain fan is too much for you, let me carry it."



Monkey didn't realize that this Pig was fake and handed him the fan. As soon as the demon king got the fan he said a spell, that turned the fan the size of an apricot leaf, and put it into his mouth. Then he reverted to his true form and swore, "Chattering chimp, do you know who I am now?" Monkey realized his terrible mistake too late and took a crack at the Bull Demon King's head with his iron cudgel.



The Tang Priest had been sitting by the road for quite a long time and was very anxious, so he sent Pig off to investigate. Pig found Monkey fighting with the Bull Demon King, so he raised his rake and joined the fight. The demon king was tiring, and he realized that he would never be able to withstand the onslaught of Pig's rake as well, so he fled in defeat.



The Bull Demon King fled back to the Cloud-touching Cave on Mount Thunder Piled and shut the door of the cave tight. Monkey and Pig reached the entrance of the cave, and landed for a short rest. "Brother," Pig asked, "have you managed to borrow the fan?" "I'd got the fan off Raksasi, but it was taken back by the Bull Demon King."



This news put Pig into a flaming temper. “The pox-ridden bullock,” he cursed. “He even dares to pretend to be me to trick my brother. It’s intolerable!” He began lashing out wildly at the door with his rake, Monkey lending a hand.



The Bull Demon King was telling Princess Jade about his encounter when some lesser spirits rushed in and reported, "The door of the cave had been broken and two demons have rushed in!" At this the demon king led other demons and spirits out to fight.



Monkey fought with the Bull Demon King and Pig battled with others inside the cave. After a hundred rounds the demon king still couldn't defeat Monkey. Worrying about the safety of Princess Jade he had no heart for fighting any longer and tried to leave the battle, but Monkey followed him closely.



When the Bull Demon King reached the cave he saw that Pig was already there and flames were coming out from the cave. Realizing that Princess Jade and other demons and spirits were in trouble he flared up and lashed out at Pig with his mace. Raising his rake, Pig went forward to meet him.



Monkey came over to help Pig. The demon king couldn't withstand the two of them, shook himself, turned into a swan and flew away.



Putting away his cudgel Monkey shook himself and turned into a vulture, who soared up into the clouds, then swooped down on the swan, seizing its neck and gouging at its eyes.



The Bull Demon King turned into a white crane and flew into the sky. Monkey turned into a phoenix, pursuing the crane. Then again the Bull Demon King shook himself, and turned into a bear. Monkey rolled on the ground and became an elephant, stretching out his trunk to enwrap the bear.



Seeing the elephant rushing at him, the Bull Demon King switched back into his original shape as a great white bull with a craggy head and flashing eyes. His pagoda-like horns aimed at the elephant's stomach.



Monkey too reverted to his own form, pulled out his cudgel and struck at the bull. Their fight alarmed all the deities, who were passing through the air, and who came to help capture the demon king. The Bull Demon King was unable to hold out any longer and fled.



Monkey wouldn't let him go and followed him closely. At that moment Heavenly King Li, the Pagoda Carrier, and his son Nezha stopped the white bull. "Great Sage," Nezha shouted, "I am here on the mandate of the Jade Emperor to help you exterminate the demon." Nezha then shouted, "Change!" He at once turned into a giant with three heads and six arms.



Nezha leapt onto the bull's back, hung his wind-fire rings on the bull's horns, blew on the magic fire, and made it blaze so fiercely that the bull pleaded, "Spare my life! I wish to be converted to a Buddhist."



Hearing this, Nezha took off the wind-fire rings from the bull's horns, tied it by the nose and, together with Monkey, Pig and the other gods, led it back to the Plantain Cave. Raksasi fell to her knees in terror, kowtowing and saying, "I beg you to spare my husband and me. I'll lend you the fan." Then she took the fan out of her husband's mouth and handed it to Monkey.



Taking the fan, Monkey bid the gods farewell. Bringing along the Princess, Monkey set out for the Fiery Mountains together with Pig and the local god. Both the Tang Priest and Friar Sand were waiting there anxiously. When they saw Monkey coming back with the plantain fan they were delighted.



When Monkey got close to the Fiery Mountains, he took out the fan, waved it as hard as he could, and put the flames out. He waved the fan again and there came a cool breeze. At the third wave the sky became overcast and a fine rain began to fall.



Seeing that the fire was put out, Princess Iron Fan bowed to Monkey and pleaded, "I beg you in your mercy to give me back the fan so that I can reform and cultivate myself." Hearing this Monkey gave her the fan and said, "Take the fan with you, go back to your mountain and don't make any more trouble." Taking the fan from Monkey, Raksasi thanked them all and left.



The *MONKEY SERIES* of picture books is based on the ancient Chinese fantasy novel *Journey to the West*, a tale rich in episodes about demons and monsters trying to stop the Tang Priest Xuanzang from reaching Thunder Monastery in India to fetch the Buddhist scriptures. The real hero of this novel, beloved by Chinese readers for four hundred years, is the resourceful, brave and humorous Monkey.

All thirty-four books in the series will be in full colour throughout.

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